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## PUBLIC ART IN PRACTICE

By CLARENCE WEINSTOCK

## MURALS WITHOUT WALLS

By FREDERICK T. KIESLER

## WHITHER PAINTING—

LURCAT, GROMAIRE, ETC.

## MARIN -1936

By ELIZABETH NOBLE

## PICASSO

IN RETROSPECT

## WHITNEY BIENNIAL

18 <sup>1936</sup> DECEMBER, 1936

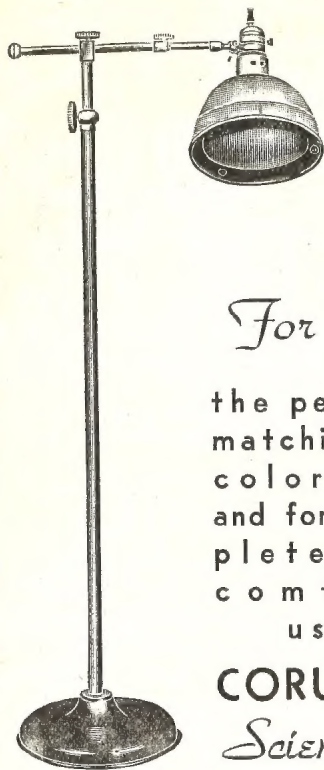
DEATH COMES FOR THE CHILDREN

KATHE KOLLWITZ

Art by

MARIN • PICASSO • BRIGGS • GORKY • SUZUKI • GIACOMETTI • PINE





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# ART FRONT

DECEMBER  
1936



## CURTAILMENT

**W**ITH dividends and profits soaring, and despite the overwhelming mandate from the people to continue and expand the activities already undertaken, the Administration is now engaged in the most strenuous effort yet made to curtail the projects. We have always been told that the powerful opposition of the Tories and reactionaries made expansion of the projects impossible. That boggy has been laid to rest. The Artists' Union, supporting the American Labor Party, helped destroy that opposition. Reports from all sections of the country show that hundreds of unemployed artists are engaged in a bitter struggle to obtain jobs. Cultural workers are not sharing in the present industrial boom. Why the attempt now to drastically cut the W.P.A.? The artists, in common with other project workers, have submitted once to the indignity of the "means test" of the Home Relief Bureaus. They have not forgotten that humiliating probe into every aspect of their private lives. They met the stringent regulations of the Home Relief Bureaus and were certified as to the extent of their extreme and abject poverty.

Delegations sent to Washington to point out the need for the expansion of the projects have been cheerfully informed that the Administration was preparing for curtailment, not expansion. James A. Farley, generalissimo of the Democratic campaign and U. S. Postmaster-General, is vacationing in England. He found time, however, to issue a statement to the press predicting a prosperity for America greater than anything we have ever known, and assured us that W.P.A. would soon be "cleaned up." We are now facing this "cleaning-up."

The attack began on the 25 per cent quota. This maneuver has evidently been temporarily shelved in favor of a general assault on the entire project. That the artists are fully aware of the significance of "investigations" and are prepared to

take vigorous action was attested by the size and enthusiasm of an emergency mass meeting called to discuss action on this issue. At this writing, a full campaign has been evolved, and includes action on a national scale—mass meetings, demonstrations, picket lines, delegations to Washington, and further action deemed advisable by the unions and organizations involved. A mass delegation, supported by hundreds of art project workers, saw the local New York administration. The worst fears of the project workers were confirmed. Investigations and lay-offs. Those who need the jobs most will remain for the time being on the project. The artist, with a dime in his pocket, will be fired in preference to his fellow worker who has only a nickel to his name. Carried out in this fashion, the projects can be decimated practically to the vanishing point. Certification of the artist by his supervisor for general merit and character would permit discrimination and make possible cases of flagrant recriminations.

The Administration is determined to cut government expenditures and at the same time put through a \$1,000,000,000 war appropriation—the largest in the history of the country. Is this the reason?

## THE ARTISTS' UNIONS AND SPAIN

**T**HE Artists' Union of New York calls on all its affiliates to come to the aid of the Spanish people against the Fascists.

The Union has so far collected \$659.27 for this cause, as well as great quantities of canned food and clothing. A dance arranged by a union committee netted \$150. This sum was sent to the Spanish Anti-Fascist Committee. The rest went to Labor's Red Cross for Spain. Money and supplies are still coming in.

Let all artists follow this example. Organize committees for Spain in your unions, collect money and supplies, explain to everyone whom you meet what

the real issues are in Spain and enlist their aid. The Spanish people will triumph with the help of workers and intellectuals throughout the world.

## CEZANNE TESTIFIES

**S**UPPOSE Paul Cézanne had not been the son of a banker. No less an authority than Ambroise Vollard, "discoverer" of Cézanne asserts that the greatest of the modern masters would have starved. Certainly he would have been unable to continue painting without a source of income.

During a press interview several weeks ago Vollard urged extension of the projects and vigorously attacked the carping critics who say that the W.P.A. fosters a great deal of bad art. "Who is to judge?" asked Vollard.

Cézanne was considered an impostor in his day by critics whose faculties were no less blunt than those of the average American art critic of today, including the eminent reviewer of the New York Times.

There are certain art lovers, all honest people, whose eyes glaze with idolatry when they mention a great artist of the past who struggled bitterly against neglect and hostile opinion. Yet these same people excoriate the idea of public support for artists of our day who do not meet their preconceived standards. We can only conclude, with incontrovertible logic, that these idolatrous gentlemen would have been the first to revile and ignore the great masters they now so piously venerate.

It's a pity that the injunctions of men like Vollard, who ought to know, are disregarded by hasty, narrow-visioned individuals who have learned nothing from the history of art and probably never will. And whenever the administration, encouraged and abetted by these "art lovers," decides to chop the projects down to established artists only, let them realize that they are chopping down the root and branch of the future.



## WOODSTOCK OPENING

ON behest of the Ulster County Artists' Union and with its active cooperation in the selection and placing of the exhibits, a number of paintings, sculptures and graphics done under TERA and WPA were shown at the Woodstock Art Gallery from October 15 to 30.

Local press notices were unanimously favorable. The most vital pieces were credited to members of the Union and to former Woodstockers who are now active in New York organizations. Evidently unity of effort toward better economic conditions has no detrimental effect on the work of the artist. If the offering of a modicum of security by the government to the project worker does not find the wholehearted approval of the nationally reputed gentlemen painters in this colony, who have taken care of their economic problems by playing ring around the rosie with the Guggenheims, then it is only necessary to compare the work of these complacent fuddy-duddies with what was shown by Emmet Edwards, Gus Schrader, Eugene Ludins, Paul Fiene, Roland Mousseau and many other Union members to come to the conclusion that a continuation into permanence of the Federal Art Projects will serve a very definite cultural end.

Aside from the aesthetic merit of the show it was enlightening to note that the attendance figures were far higher than at any time during the summer when the town was crowded. Our next-door neighbors as well as people from Saugerties and Kingston came by the hundreds. Many had never set foot into this temple of cliché. Instead of the slow dribble of bored matrons with culture-subdued husbands on the leash there were lively groups of interested townsmen, farmers, shop-keepers—a cross-section of Ulster County residents—animated by what they saw. Their behavior proved that the dormant interest in Art can be awakened. An exhibition of work produced by artists who are responsive to the questions of today seems to do the trick.

The U.C.A.U. is a small alert group of young artists and writers. Other achievements in connection with the projects were: the placing of needy artists on the pay roll; the restoration of a deficiency in pay; the resignation of a supervisor; the payment of wages by mail; the redress of general and particular grievances.

The Union seems to have withstood successfully the infant diseases which were fatal to the Mural Painters Guild and the Artists' League. There is assur-

ance of its continued growth and activity in cooperation with other Artists' Unions.

We appreciate the support given us by the Eastern District and wish to enlist its aid in our present fight for New York City pay and conditions.

## NEWS FROM NEW JERSEY

ART FRONT greets the Artists' Union of New Jersey, organized by a small group of artists in Jersey City in the early part of September, with Mr. S. Maxey and Miss A. Hammer of the New York union directing its formation.

A local has been established in Newark, affiliated to the New York Artists' Union. A concerted membership drive is planned by the union members, most of whom

are project workers. Prominent easel and mural painters, sculptors, teachers and commercial artists are already regular and active members.

Meetings with the foremost galleries and framing concerns have furnished the artists with commissions and contracts establishing a Union wage scale for art work.

A series of lectures by well-known artists has been arranged as the first step of a broad cultural program proposed by the union.

Miss Pauline Ormond of 2 Shanley Ave., Newark, has been delegated to answer any questions from artists regarding the Union and its activities. She also requests the names and addresses of any artists eligible for membership.

# JOHN MARIN- 1936

By Elizabeth Noble

THE case of John Marin may be taken as the whole case of contemporary native art, which in turn may be defined as the whole struggle of the artist to survive in a hostile and unresponsive environment. That today many artists are turning away from their former belief in a single-handed struggle against philistine society and seeking instead to find ways and means of identifying themselves with the people does not invalidate the historical significance of Marin's life and work. (Certain factors and a given age produced Marin; the result could not have been otherwise.)

It is customary to speak of Marin as the great undiscovered genius of American painting. The "best known unknown painter" is the popular statement of the truth that Marin has not been acclaimed and honored as lesser talents have been. Yet as the leading light of the Stieglitz group, of whom O'Keefe and Dove are but slightly less brilliant luminaries, Marin has had his *succès d'estime* among the cognoscenti; a success recorded not in columns of newspaper publicity but subtly suggested in the beautiful privately printed *Letters* (published by An American Place in 1931) and in E. M. Benson's *John Marin: The Man and His Work* (published last year by the American Federation of Art.)

However it took the retrospective exhibition of water colors, oils and etchings at the Museum of Modern Art last month to put the official cachet of approval on this New-Jersey-born American who speaks an almost Yankee twang. Max Weber, Maurice Sterne, Edward Hopper, and Gaston Lachaise all have been previously singled out by the museum and given one-man exhibitions as American artists. It is no disparagement of them to remark that Marin should have headed the list as being the most authentic product of an indigenous tradition in which Winslow Homer and Whistler play a leading part. Belatedly now the museum makes handsome amends when its director, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., writes in the catalog, "with his paintings hung on the neutral walls of the museum, Marin must fight his own battle. Will he win? The writer, if he may be pardoned for taking sides in an official preface, believes positively that he will, and that the museum's hospitality will be more than justified."

As far as seasoned followers of exhibitions are concerned and as far as the metropolitan press is concerned, this optimism was justified by results. Moreover, thousands of people flocked into the portals of the West 53rd Street museum, made familiar to them by the van Gogh



exhibition, who had never heard of Stieglitz or his "291," "Intimate Gallery" or "An American Place." Here indeed with the layman Marin did have to fight his battle. Now is it possible that from this unequal combat, between the esoteric and abstruse mysteries of Marin's brush and the blunt, in some ways unlettered mind of the man in the street, new definitions of Marin's meaning will emerge? Certainly no new statement was made in the exhibition's catalog, lavishly gotten up though it was. Here was the old metaphysical, cult-like adoration, which has often served in the past to estrange would be friends.

**B**UT criticism and appreciation today have turned away from adoration and mysteries. It is a stern and bitter external world the artist faces. He will find no aid or comfort by retreating into the depths of his own awareness; he must confront reality. Therefore neither the artist nor the critic nor the layman will be satisfied to be told that Marin is a great artist, that he has immeasurably extended the horizons of water color, that his art is a perfect expression of his living, that "no one else has ever done anything like that." Everyone who is deeply alive to the currents of life in these times has got to be from Missouri; he must demand to be shown.

That is the baffling thing about Marin's work. It is almost impossible to show wherein his greatness lies. And yet after a number of years of seeing and studying his pictures, the writer continues to believe that Marin is a great artist, despite the fact that an opposite opinion exists in some quarters. To say this does not imply that there may not be intellectual and emotional errors in his position, nor is it to insist all artists in the future shall be little Marins. On the contrary, it seems very probable that there will not be any more Marins, and indeed that the thing Marin has created may end with him, or at least that it will not be re-born for a long time.

Now the thing that Marin has created seems to this observer to be an almost perfect cryptogram of man's observation and reaction to nature. In his water colors we have an architect's shorthand statement of terrain; and whether the subject is Maine, the Tyrol, New York City, the White Mountains, Lake Champlain or New Mexico, there is the most concise and economical expression of the artist's vision of the world. Marin's world happens to be for the most part waves and rocks and trees; skyscrapers and city bridges also obey his anthropomorphic will. Only in recent years have human figures crept into his compositions, as in

the large oil of a circus scene or the water color, "Young Man of the Sea." This is highly significant if we are to take as a thesis that the ruling idea of 19th century American art was the expression in personal terms of personal experience and that this experience was often, or usually, concentrated on a romantic and transcendental nature-worship.

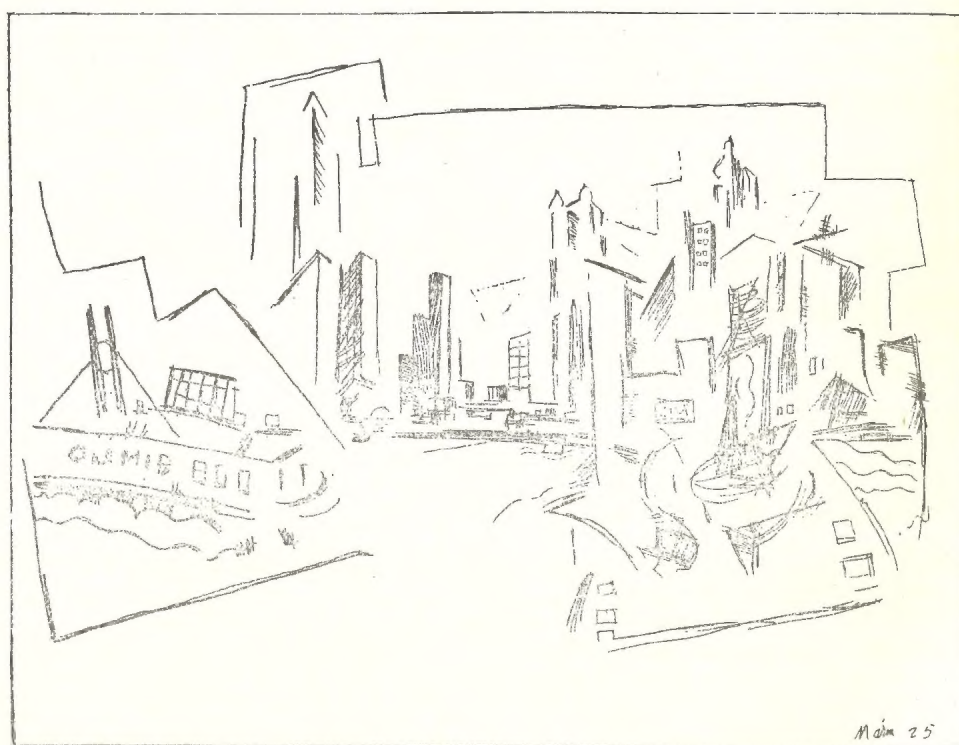
**T**HIS point could surely be sustained by calling on a number of witnesses, the Hudson River artists, Thoreau and Walden, Emily Dickinson, to mention but a few. In painting, Winslow Homer, to whose (unappreciated) water colors Marin seems closer than is generally admitted, and Whistler, to whom Marin acknowledges an early allegiance, brought this nostalgic, romantic love of the earth and sea and sky down to our times. In the 20th century Marin has developed this theme to consummate terms. We believe this is unquestionable and that in the development of an American tradition (if the existence and validity of such a thing is admitted) this sequence was inevitable. Where the sequence leads, or if it leads anywhere, is another question.

Undoubtedly the emphasis today is very much on man, in contradistinction to nature (if we may crib the old headings used in the first series of Emily Dickinson's poems; and if we may go farther and split one of her headings)

and much more on time than on eternity. These are not days of apocalypse or revelation; they are days of the sternest and most disciplined objectivity—days, moreover, in which the artist seeks frantically to ally himself with society, lest he be left isolated in a universe where there is no salvation except collectively. When concepts such as these rule men's minds and lives, it is no wonder that Marin seems a very long way off.

In fact, in some ways he seems as far away as Chinese painting, in which nature occupied a central place and man was but an incident in the occult and aloof hierarchy of endless and indivisible being. And it may be that all periods of art called "great" today achieve this sense of effortlessness and abstractness only because they are removed in time from us. To the generation that preceded them, they may have seemed lawlessly turbulent; to the generation that followed them—meaninglessly pallid.

These paradoxes are set down, because although Marin in some ways seems far removed from the turmoil of the world in which younger artists today live and struggle, actually he is not far enough away so that we can look back impersonally and justly on his work. Of a generation already mature and hard at work when the 20th century was born, Marin is rooted in the 19th century. If one is permitted to speak allegorically, as



**DOWNTOWN, RIVER MOVEMENT**

*Etching*

**JOHN MARIN**

*Courtesy Museum of Modern Art*



though one century were as sharply marked off from another state on a colored map, that 19th century *zeitgeist* was ruled by a splendid individualism, whose cognate in our nation's foreign policy was to be a splendid isolation surviving into the 20th century like vestigial structure.

**B**UT the 20th century time-spirit is more and more coming under the sway of collectivism, of the identification of the individual with the group. Here are two attitudes drastically opposed, even though the one grew out of the other. Since this is so, it is almost im-

possible for a man of the 20th century to look at a man of the 19th century with real understanding and magnanimity. The 21st century no doubt will be able to look tolerantly at the 19th, as we do at the 18th. Perhaps till then there will be no real appraisal of the esthetic and social meaning of John Marin's art.

We hope this will not be wholly true, however. The beauty of the natural world he has seen and recorded is part of our tradition today, even though the circumstances of life do not permit most men and women to possess that beauty. The waves which Winslow Homer and Ryder also painted with great beauty will not al-

ways whisper with the diminuendo note of Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach." New Mexico's fang-shaped mountain ranges will not always speak only of the austere loneliness of existence, nor will Manhattan's skyscrapers always seem about to destroy the human midgits who created them. When order and a nobly classic life have been built in the world, it will be possible to observe that this was the order and the form Marin in his water colors and oils was seeking to impose single-handed on nature. Meanwhile we should value this work as an organic part of the historical evolution of American art.

## WHITHER PAINTING

### Opinions and Conversations Collected by Proudhon

(From Commune, Paris)

J. F. Laglenne

*J. F. Laglenne accuses bourgeois society of having wished to reduce painters to the role which clowns once played before their kings.*

—... An artist, he asserts, always remains a person without a class.

—Yet one must be clear about this qualification and the moral judgment it implies. Will not the greatness of a work be a function of the resistance which its creator has been capable of opposing to the class which not only exploits him, but which accepts him solely for the sake of its own amusement, its own diversion? ...

J. F. Laglenne seems to agree, declaring:

—With the crisis begins the return of painters to a more authentically social art. Painting as an object of luxury or speculation has disappeared. On the other hand, abstract painting has run its course. We have reached the resurrection of the portrait, the psychological document, which expresses the vices, the blemishes, the uneasiness, but also the revolt and the new qualities of a period of transition.

The plastic art of tomorrow will be the mural, which will restore to ornament its most exalted rôle within the architecture of railroad stations, theatres, hospitals and stadiums.

—You say, tomorrow—but what about today?

—Today, the constant danger of war, the armament race, creates an atmosphere scarcely propitious for creation. At any rate, it is no time for an ivory tower.



GIACOMETTI  
RESPONDS WITH  
A DRAWING

Marcel Gromaire

"To say that subject matter is of no importance is equivalent to saying that art is a game, a diversion for ethetes. I have always thought that there was an abject resignation in all this: and that, since the true subject of art is man in the universe, it was snobbish nonsense to

see in art nothing but a game. Our generation (that of the 90s), plunged since its youth in the filth of the war, has found itself violently recalled to the order of the universe. Though decimated, it still has its word to say. . . . There are two ways of being human. In the egocentric manner, one cultivates within a rich soil well stuffed with pride the rare plant he believes himself to be, and, as cock of the walk, finds himself surrounded only with pretexts for sovereign caprice. But if one considers that ingenuity is not genius, and that genius can be found only in communion, art becomes an exchange-value; and the artist is great only if he evokes whatever is most fatal in the common measure of values. This art, issuing from banality, will be banal only if, tainted with academicism, it misses its goal and devoted itself to exalting those appearances which it ought to destroy. Magician of the real, the artist deludes himself if, on the one hand, he considers the object as his slave, and, on the other, separating the spectator from the spectacle, seduced by the fetishism of the object, fails to place all his emphasis on the *place* which unites man to nature. The artist, however talented he may be, is worth, in the last analysis, only what he is worth as a man; and, though he is capable of discovering beautiful monsters for himself, a man is, however, only efficacious in the fraternal sense.

Also it is vain to ask oneself if the artist is social. The artist, under the threat



of being nothing but a puppet, ought to be the most social of all beings. At the service of all and of none, he is truly free only in the condition of being the most enthralled; he may receive everything, but ought also to bestow everything. And those who speak glibly of his necessary solitude, do not understand to what degree this solitude, replete with all the voices of the world, is paradoxical, and how unbearable it would be to many people. In any case, it contains its own corrective, and becomes perishable as soon as it degenerates in isolation.

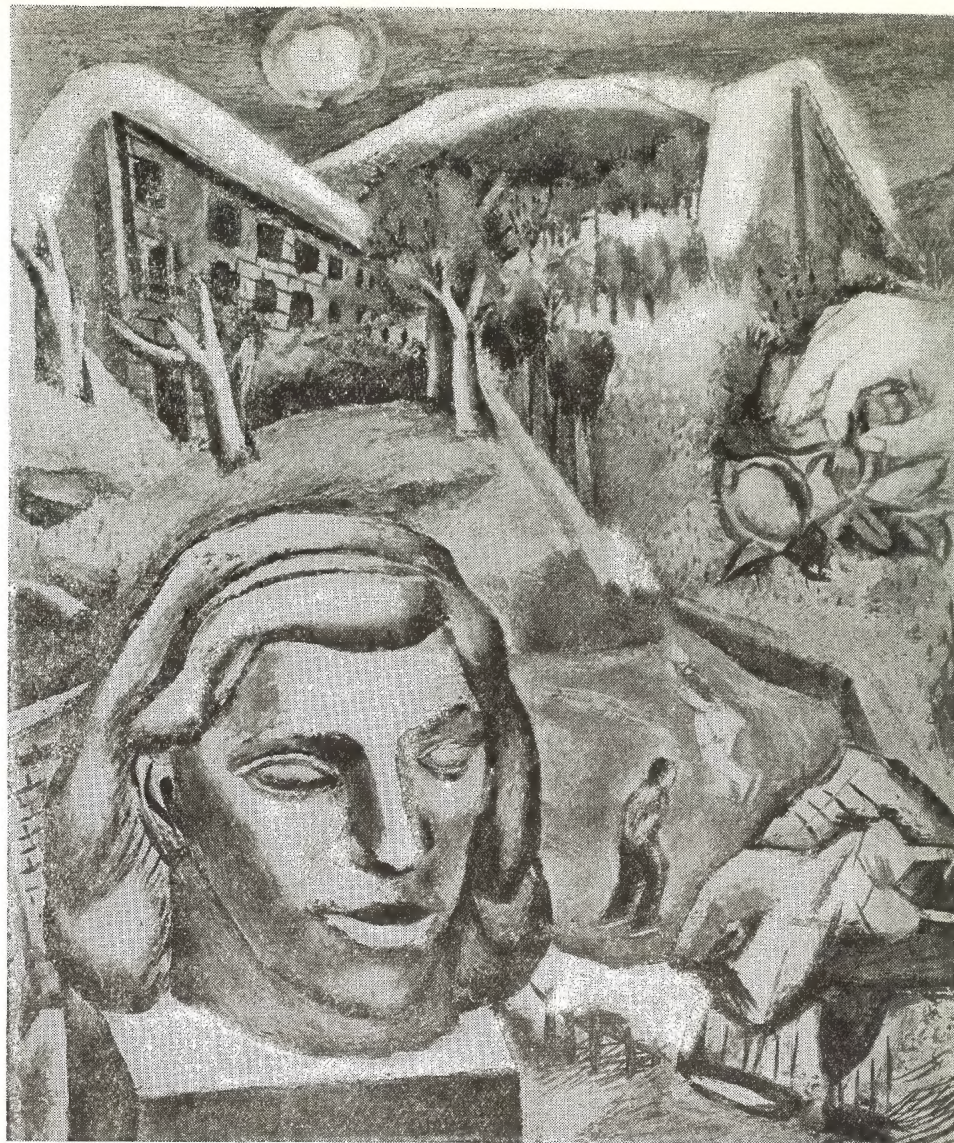
Jean Lurçat

*Jean Lurçat does not believe in the absolute freedom of the painter. Neither his brush nor his inspiration can pretend to be autonomous.*

—From the technical point of view, he explains, we are determined by the work of our predecessors and every particular ideology is a function of the general ideas of the epoch. For the past thirty years, painting has declared itself against subject matter. Certainly, there were technical reasons for this: the art of painting had unravelled itself into small impressionist tremors. But that was not all.

*Lurçat locates abstract art historically.*

—It is necessary to see in it he explains, the concrete form of a certain pessimism. The creator was unable to rejoice at the manifestation of so much snobbishness, at the spectacle of what served as an ideal for the Third Republic. Two roads were open to him: the revolutionary emphasis, or the laboratory. The great technicians chose the laboratory. I am not judging: I am describing. I declare also that there was in this for painting as well as for the painter a danger of which we were quickly forced to become aware. Also, the youngest of us were preoccupied (in quite different manners) with the expression of the internal world. From which developed the desperate character of the most representative works of the epoch. All of us knew that "that" could no longer, that we could no longer, go on. The crisis forced



OF HER PAST

SAKARI SUZUKI

Courtesy A.C.A. Gallery

those who were unwilling to see to ascertain the well-founded aspects of our attitude. An attitude which is still individualistic, though insufficient. In order to regenerate the art of painting, the necessity arises to broaden it out, to lead it back to the concrete. I believe we are getting under way.

—Painting with or without subject matter? I have gotten to the point of asking myself if the question is still of any importance. What must be changed is the accent. It is necessary that it stop being aesthetic. The fascists have abused the word "human." We have a definite objection to using it. I prefer to speak of "reclamative." Through the medium of accent or subject matter the painter ought to express a total lack of accord between himself and a culture of which the least

that can be said is that it has the singular odor of a corpse. Those who do not feel in their bones the contemporary drama ought at least to have the instinct of rats deserting the sinking ship. But every negation implies an affirmation. The painter ought to elaborate an entirely renovated culture for which certain materials are necessary, not to be found among the dying. In order to work, it is required, then, not merely to place oneself at the side of the masses, who bear within themselves the very seeds of regeneration, but to submerge oneself in them. The road is long, delicate, and difficult. It seems often a thankless task, but in the face of the menaces of war and fascism, how is one to bring himself to following any other!

(Translated by Harold Rosenberg)



# PUBLIC ART IN PRACTICE

By Clarence Weinstock

**A** PUBLIC Use of Art Committee has been organized in the Artists Union. Having already the active support of fifty artists\* the work of this group must be regarded as the most important cultural step which the union has taken since its beginning three years ago. I shall try to point out why this is so.

The recent development of American art has been notable less for its technical innovations than for the extraordinary growth of a sense of responsibility in the artists. The duty of the artist toward his art, that is toward himself, has been augmented by a new sensitivity to society which must sooner or later transform his art. The rise of the Artists Union was the first stage of this growth. The Artists Congress, through which the economic struggle of the artists was given political implications, indicated a second, higher stage. The idea of the public use of art springs directly out of modern social conditions and from the artists' organizations created to deal with them.

The committee's first action was to demand that the idea of the public use of art on which the Federal Art Project was operating be freed of its conventional character which placed a virtual censorship upon the artists. The art projects, ostensibly devoted to the widest communication between the artists and the people, have actually been bound by the philistine opinion of the administration that public art must be confined to murals and canvases in official and semi-official places. This has resulted in easel paintings' being confined to still life and landscape and in innumerable ludicrous disputes with jailers, decency experts, ward heelers, school superintendents and certain alcoholics in the city departments. Occasionally even the administration couldn't take it. The committee proposed that it be allowed to contact places where the public use of art might have much greater meaning, namely the trade unions and mass organizations of the workers of New York. Mrs. MacMahon, regional

able to order directly what they wanted to see. The artists need no longer paint what the administration considers appropriate for its mythical public but what the real public of hundreds of thousands of trade unionists thinks appropriate for itself. The committee at once contacted the unions in New York City. Here are their "commissions," though indirect, to the artists:

**T**HE International Ladies' Garment Workers Unions suggests five groups of subjects: emigration of garment workers from Europe in the 1890's and 1900's; working conditions in the garment industry at that time—the sweat shops; the fire which led to the dress-makers' strike of 1905; the strike (taking the oath, then workers coming out); anything illustrating the present activities of the union.

The Transport Workers Union wants: the history of transportation in New York City; the history of the union; the building of the first elevated in 1865; present day construction scenes in New York; scenes in the steel industry; the Irish transport strike of 1911-13; the Easter Week rebellion in 1916 (most transport workers are Irish).

The Ministers Union and the Labor Temple ask for scenes showing the unity of labor and subjects related to activities of progressive liberal churches, such as

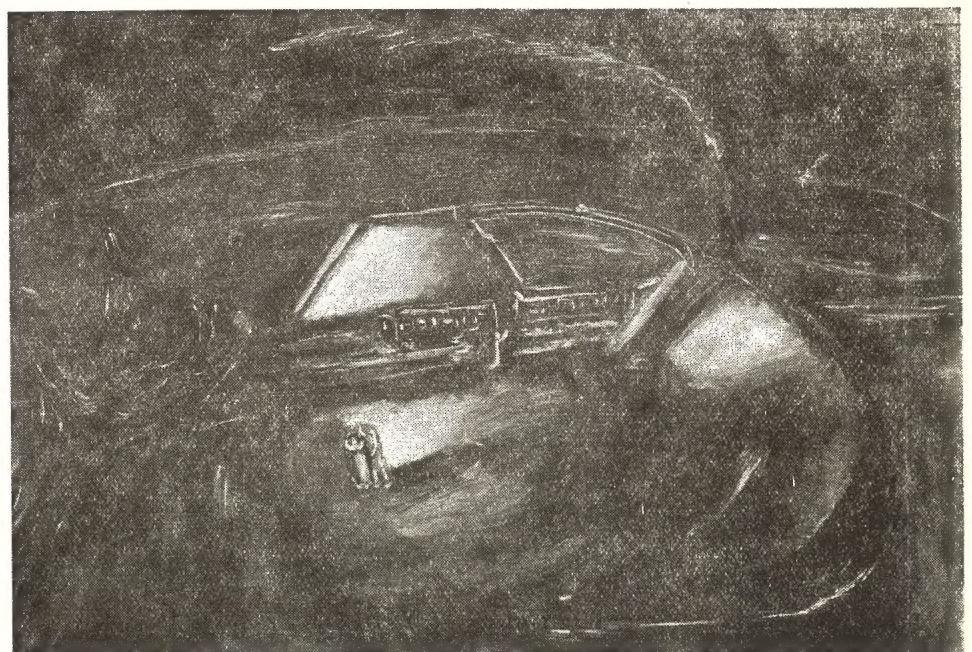
anti-war movements.

The Union of Dining Car Employees needs works showing the effect of speed-up on dining car employees; the battle for union recognition on the Santa Fe; anti-war subjects; exploitation of women employed in hotel dining rooms and kitchens; anti-lynching subjects; scenes in the culinary industry; Negro discrimination.

The Sign Writers' Union wants pictures illustrating the effects of Fascism on the trade union movement; the Mooney-Billings case; Hearst's enmity toward the working class.

The Amalgamated Housing Corporation of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers' Union suggests a series showing how New Yorkers live and the contrast of life under a system of profit economy with that under a cooperative economic system.

The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters has submitted a document which merits separate publication. It unfolds for the artist the history of one of the most heroic struggles of the American working class, the organization of the Negro porters in the face of oppression and terror. An added note makes this recommendation to the artist: "Kindly have running through the entire series of paintings relative to the Pullman porters and the Brotherhood a pattern of struggle, sacrifice and fighting."



DEPARTURE

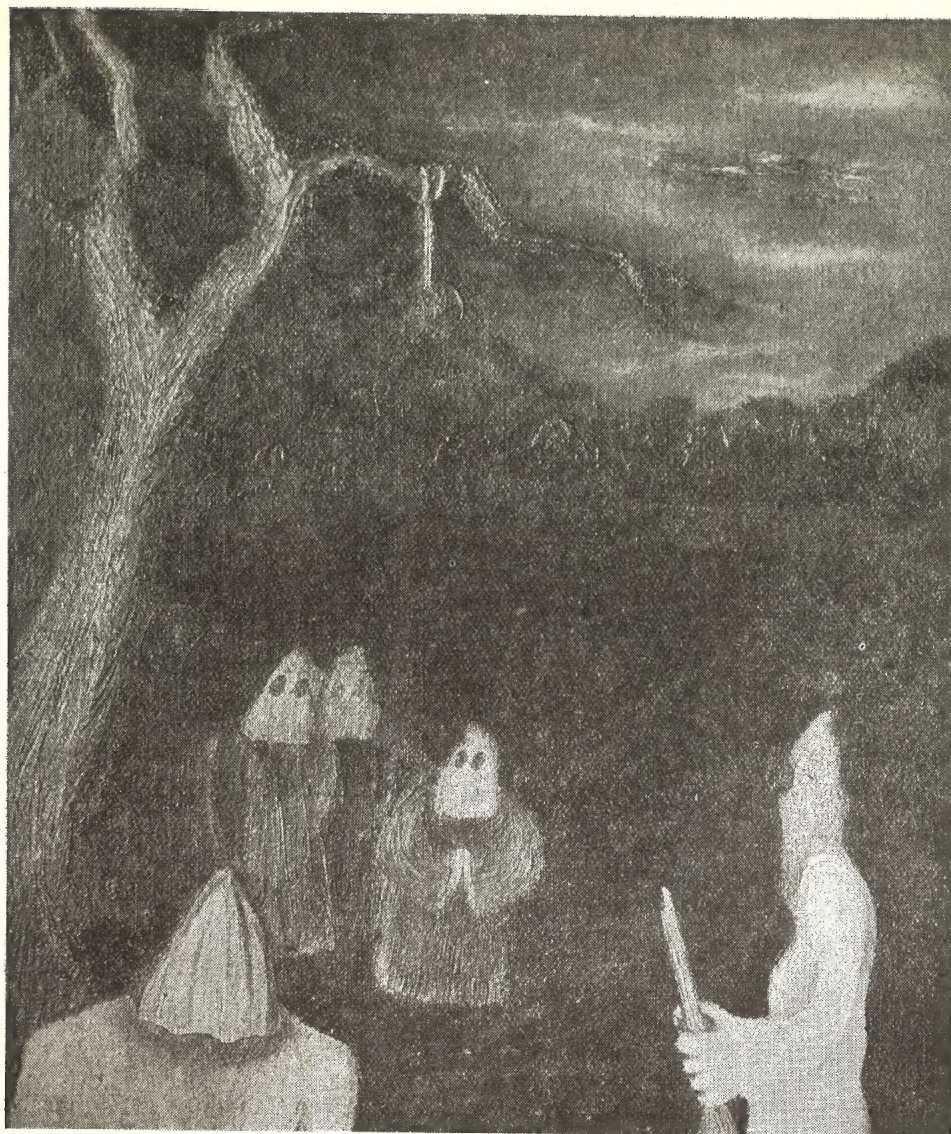
GERI PINE

Courtesy A.C.A. Gallery

\* Among the artists who have volunteered to work with the committee are Will Barnet, Raphael Soyer, Minna Harkavy, Vincent D'Agostino, Ted Egri, Hugh Miller, Jennings Tofel, Otto Botto, Joe Solman, Ida Abelman and Oronzo Gasparo.

director of the project, conceded that work might be lent to such organizations, the unions suggesting, though not being





GEORGIA

JUDSON BRIGGS

*Courtesy Uptown Gallery*

"Show the evolution of Pullman porters' wives and sisters, mothers and daughters from the period when they remained in the home waiting for the porters to bring them their checks, to the period when porters' women relatives are marching down Seventh Avenue and Broadway in great demonstrations fighting for the right of porters to organize for better wages, shorter hours and improved working conditions for their men."

Other unions which are preparing to send in proposals for execution are the Cafeteria Workers, the Pharmacists, the Musicians' Local 802, the Bricklayers' Local 37, the Doll and Toymakers, the Food Workers and the Marine Firemen and Oilworkers. Once the artists have completed their work it is only necessary for the unions to make a formal request to the project for its exhibition at their headquarters.

**T**HIS approach of artists and workers to each other must be a landmark in the history of trade unionism and of art. The worker watching his daily life given

formal expression, being able to contemplate his struggles and hopes in oils, lithos, posters, photographs, murals and sculpture, rises above his own experiences, does not merely participate in them, but comes to understand them, to perceive their meaning and direction. No longer a simple trade unionist, keeping his wages intact and his hours down, he comprehends himself as the figure of a class. These men and women with whom he is marching down Seventh Avenue are not merely his bench mates whose trouble he shares; they are himself, worker on all continents, who knows power presses, turbines, Diesel engines, and wants his world to move the way they do. The artist shows him a street and he sees arrows.

The artist returns from his exile to working humanity. It is clear now that his flight was forced upon him by the corruption of the social structure which had supported him materially and spiritually. The story of contemporary art is the description of the forms and psycho-

logical devices, the planes and ironies by which creative men relieved or justified their separation from science and society. The modern artist has now, like the worker, to rise above his limited experience, to solidify his vague knowledge of the external world, nature, history, to become more cultured, more trained, more active. But whereas the worker learns to direct his experiences with ideas, the artist has to deepen his ideas with experience, questioning, participation. Here is where the worker is able to help him. The meeting of hand and brain workers has a dialectical character in two ways; it is the basis for a new art just as it presages a new society.

No one should understand that it is a question of "better painting." You will have to go through the same old technical discipline, the same exhaustive study of form, the experiments with color, and the severe, perhaps even more intense application to drawing. Picasso may still be "better" than you. But that is not the point.

The point is that through the comradeship of the working class the artist is being introduced to the modern world for the first time. Before, it was hearsay of machines, instruments, banks, hospitals, courthouses, hunger, fights, injuries, common pleasures of days and nights. The artist was rarely invited. If he came he left his eyes at home. The commissions given him by the unions re-determine the whole nature of his experience. They awaken elements of his imagination never yet called into action. They arouse conflicts of personal and aesthetic adjustment to which he must bring not five but a hundred new senses, new ideas, new values. The problem of form and content becomes an academic abstraction unless it is made part of the creative operation which the artist must perform upon his own body and mind.

**T**HE artist's mission is not to "teach" the workers but to educate himself. He is not there to lead the workers gently away from their concrete demands to sympathy for the "higher" forms of art. The committee is not conducting a course in art appreciation. It may be proper here to say a word about the corruption of taste generally attributed to workers. They go to the movies but not to exhibitions. Aside from the fact that the galleries are generally open during working hours only, why should they go? This art has nothing to do with them, resembles nothing in their lives. They are not debased, like their refined masters, who honor what they can neither believe in nor understand. Neither do they care much for allegories, "Hope," "Justice," "Charity," which gives them an edge on



the Treasury Department. Then who are their artists? Goya, Daumier, Grosz, Käthe Kollwitz, John Heartfield, the Mexican muralists, Gropper, Burck, the poster men of the civil war in Spain. We see that taste too has a social character. It alters according to the class whose condition, needs and foresight it expresses.

Note the admirable realism of the union proposals. They are the key to a

new objectivity in the arts, which means neither naturalism, academic representation, nor bondage to any one technical convention. The artist will be as curious about materials as the worker is about gadgets. He will try not only oil, fresco, tempera, but ink, film, montage, collage, stone, clay, metal, wood, concrete, silk screen, the treasures of the commercial art studios, the power presses, etc. He will work singly and collectively. He

will use any symbols he needs, gestures, degrees of light and darkness, solid and transparent bodies, monsters, images of terror and of power. All that the workers demand is that he uses more than his eyes to see with, that he study continually, be prepared with knowledge, and join in their common struggle for a rich, free, truly modern life. They are looking toward the same real world, infinite in variety, beauty and possibility.

## MURALS WITHOUT WALLS

Relating To Gorky's Newark Project

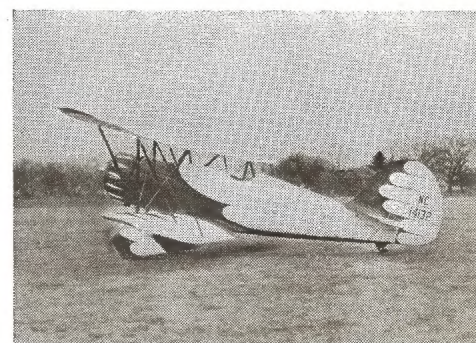
By FREDERICK T. KIESLER

THE brush filled with watery paint is set right into the wall; that is mural painting. The brush with creamy paint set on canvas or wood or glass or any material which is hung in front of a wall, is easel painting. Now if this is right, many of the modern paintings called mural paintings are not mural paintings but easel paintings muralized by pasting a painted canvas on the wall. Mosaic seems to have been an industrialized genuine mural painting, so here is a very early sample of industrialized handicraft in the field of fine arts. Many painters might object to being called handicraftsmen because they feel as though they are aristocrats of the order of fine arts. The public of course, is not interested in how the painting is painted, mural or easel, it is interested in the effect, in the message of the work (or not even in that). But we craftsmen and technicians know that the technique of a work has quite a lot to do with its final expression and we therefore like to look underneath a chair to see how it has been manufactured, not only to sit on it and try its comfort; we also like to test its "finish," the surface treatment and texture. In that span which consists of the tiny space between the material, a painting is painted on and the final surface—epidermis lies the story of the craftsmanship of its creator. Now this is in the genuine mural painting probably the micro-minutest space, and in easel oil painting the micro-mightiest one. And that because the mural painting *buono al fresco* sucks the painting into the wet wall ground and interbinds it with the building structure while swallowing it. If your hand glides over the mural painting, you do not feel it, but the roughness of the wall itself; your skin gliding over an oil painting feels the bulk of paint and stroke. This transparency of

watery al fresco painting was one of the great attractions for the painter and he definitely played with the wall ground as to color and texture which glowed through his paint into the eye of the observer. That fine, that sensitive texture-technical feeling of a mural painter is too inherent with the talent of such a craftsman to have been lost at any time anywhere in these centuries, but it seems natural also that in certain periods of time and with the artists individually this sense might have remained undeveloped or restrained in its exercise. Of course in regard to mural painting, there is not only the sensitivity of the painter as a deciding factor, but the environment-elements too, the architectural structure that underlies his paint, and the building as a frame coordinating his own composition into a "heterogeneous unity." An easel painter has the control of the unity and finality of his work in his own mind and hand, not so the mural painter. Even the coordination of the easel painting to a wall is in the hand of the easel painter by his designing and choosing of a frame for his strictly bound composition. This frame of wood, carved or plain, colored or natural, is the independent intermediate between his painting, a very personal expression, and the surrounding wall of a room, a very general and impersonal background.

Anyone who is about to change this age-old tradition of mural technique, more than a tradition, this very outgrowth of a natural impulse that has crystallized going through mind and hand for centuries, a man who undertakes to change this natural flux of expression is either very revolutionary, or an amateur, or the victim of the pressure of external factors. The question is, can you detach the quality of the work from its tech-

nique? I am inclined to say: No. Of course any artist of quality will express his quality in almost every medium, but, and that is the crux, he will use each medium rightly. If somebody paints a mural painting on canvas in oil paint (as in the case of Gorky) he is either revolutionary, an amateur, or one who is prevented by a vice-majeur to do what he



thinks it right to do, for instance, the lack of material, the lack of proper wall preparation, the shortness of time, or the necessity for a "mobile" mural painting due to shortlived building structure as a whole. It seems that this last group of factors were the ones which decided Gorky in his choice of detached canvas and oil paint for this wall decoration at the Newark Airport.

Gorky tried to invent a new oil paint technique for this departure from common mural treatment. He uses oil paint in an outflattened equalizing cover, paralleling in this manner the super-individual objective expression of the room-enclosing surface. Large planes covered with equal coloring, combined with the omission of light and shadow, and linear and atmospheric perspective helps to bring the two-dimensionality of a wall definitely to your conscience. He has thus overcome the handicaps of which I spoke before, most valiantly.

\* \* \*

There seems to be a distinction between the W.P.A. work-orders to Art-Workers and the Federal Treasury Art Department; because the Director of Procurement establishes in cooperation with the Supervising Architect's office the stand-



ards the Art-Workers have to meet by means of competition, to have their chance at a wall. The W.P.A. Art-Heads have by way of relief employment, a broader scope and consequently a broader point of view, having already in the selected artists, standards of quality. The vast army of art workers on relief offers the chance of discovering unknown Art-Workers and is therefore not restricted either by fame-names or antiquated competition rules. The Treasury Department, the other official agency for murals, is actually the "greatest architectural client in the world" and its architectural activities affect communities of every size from coast to coast. "To coordinate and care for this immense work in a manner which would be economical, efficient, and an aid to recovery, the Procurement Department was so organized in 1933 that architecture, engineering and supplies for Federal buildings could be brought under one head, the Director of Procurement. In short the Treasury Department, having had as one of its traditional duties, the supervision of Federal architecture, has now taken over the educational and esthetic work of adding distinction to its architecture (probably meaning modernized Greek cornices, columns, pediments, free-for-all-style-partisan Parthenon-like sculptured adornments, gilded, colored, flood-lighted, in short: the procurement of gigantic stone masks of architectural tragedies and comedies) by means of painting and sculpture. The present Treasury Department art program was initiated by order of the Secretary of the Treasury, Mr. Henry Morgenthau, Jr., on October 16, 1934. The Treasury had

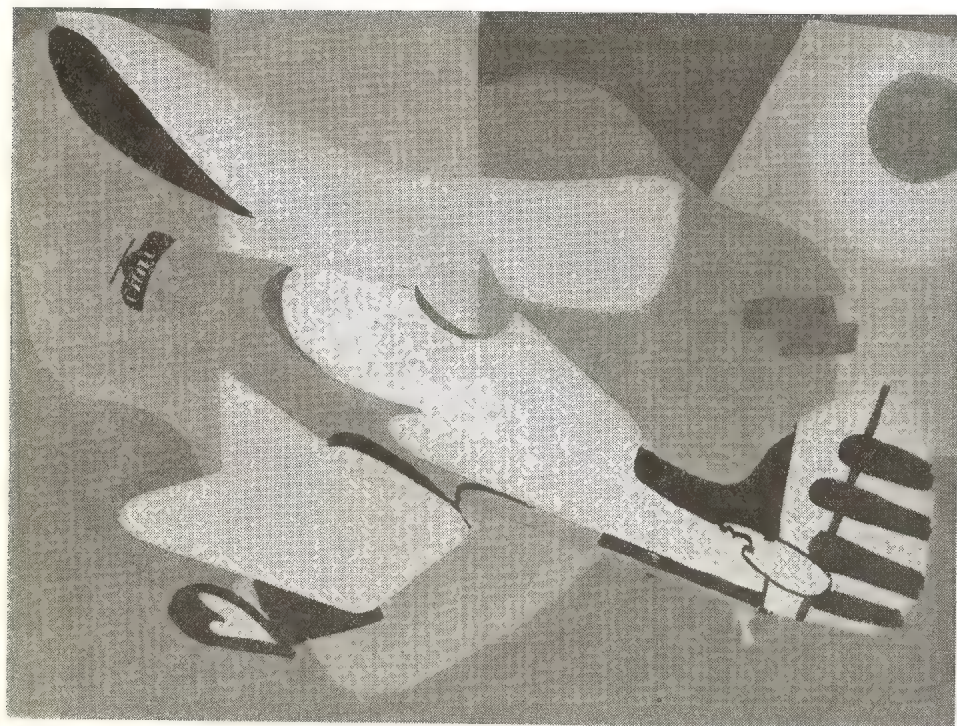
administered successfully the first Artists' employment agency, the Public Works of Art Project (December, 1933—June, 1934) which has since been used as a model of organization by other projects (this is quoted from the catalogue of the Whitney Museum Show of American Art written by Forbes Watson), while during the past administrations it has given out a certain number of mural and sculpture commissions. But the present program is *the first completely organized plan to co-ordinate painting, sculpture and architecture.*"

Who coordinates painting, sculpture into ONE? That is what we would like to know. Is it the Director of Procurement, is it Mr. Forbes Watson or is it the Supervising Architect's office? Well, it is the Supervising Architect's office because here it is in black and white: "... in each case employment is limited to professional artists *capable of meeting the standards established by the Supervising Architect's office.* . . ." In other words the architects who plan the Federal buildings and who set the standards for themselves are dictating the standards also to painters and sculptors or whoever might be called upon to work inside or outside their wall enclosures. Consider the artist of today who has to meet standards of the past.

The bridge to contact the both sides of this unbridgeable abyss is evidently—money. The artist has to live, the building has to be decorated, the Government has good will. The artist exerts himself in private discussions but if it comes to the moment where he has to stand for his theories and throw away chances of earning and publicity and pushing oneself

into the front rows, problems and early strivings are forgotten "just for a moment." And then results that strange "coordination of architecture, painting and sculpture" that is no unit at all if we understand as unity the integration of spiritual, technical and social aspects. Have the Art-Workers ever thought to submit to the Supervising Architect's office their own idea of standards of what man-built-environment should represent for human beings living today with both feet on the ground of this country rather than with one foot in Egypt, one in Greece, one in Rome, one in Stuttgart, and one in Potzleinsdorf. In all seriousness this is a most important matter. You, Art Worker accept the dictation of standards, of styles that are not yours, to be the constant companion-environment for your work without attempting to present your own formula to the Director of Procurement for what the scheme of coordination of your work with the architecture calls for. Such formulation will create new standards, adequate contemporary standards, which the Supervising Architect's office should consider in co-operation with you before, not after, building plans have been accepted in blue-prints. This way the goal of artistic-structural integration will at least be approached in a contemporary spirit.

Of course Gorky wouldn't have a chance under normal circumstances, which means the present in time but the past in architecture. I quote again: "This work (meaning the murals) is not addressed to *esthetes who cherish the misunderstood.* It is addressed to the community in general and like *the art of all great periods* it is objectively understandable." Well, no abstraction, boys! Better go home and learn how to design wrinkles, and never mind wrinkles in an abstract way, but these must stick to nose and mouth and eyes and even ears. You know, biologically correct. This is the age of science. Farmers usually wear heavy glasses and they look deep into the picture and if the Model-T Ford doesn't look like a model-T Ford but like a Chrysler, it won't do. Even if one could explain that Gorky's mural design is very realistic since he transplanted directly photographic details of airplanes or even one whole airplane and in the same naturalistic distortion of the camera shot, it won't help; it isn't abstract, but it looks like an abstraction and that alone doesn't fit into "the art of all great periods." I wonder if Picasso would go on the relief roll under such circumstances. . . . If the object of your vision does not meet the imagination of the spectator you and your work are definitely objectionable: they "don't look like Pa and Ma."



GORKY MURAL BASED ON PHOTO AT LEFT

Courtesy W.P.A. Mural Project



# PICASSO

## In Retrospect



### THREE CRITICAL ESTIMATES

**P**ICASSO and several of his personalities are to be seen now in New York—a softer self in “Blue” and “Rose” at Seligman’s—in more agitated guises at the Valentine gallery. There is sufficient perspective to reevaluate some of the problems he has posed for himself and for all artists.

Briefly, Picasso’s most serious researches were concerned with a new formalistic structure for the art of painting. Rebellious in 1907 against his Pompeian or “Pink” period he seized upon Cézanne and Negro sculpture for new plastic forms. This marks the decisive break with the enslavement of the Greek tradition which has bound Western art through Renoir. Primitive African is pitched against Hellenic Greek. A Cézanne still-life versus a Pompeian fresco.

Thus Cubism emerges, the greatest plastic contribution since the Renaissance. The modest still-life achieves prominence as the simplest object on which to expend sheer technical research. An abstract idealism covers the years 1910-1920. Picasso never quite deserts the subject while Lissitzky and Moholy-Nagy go on to create pure abstractions and constructions. Lissitzky calls his work the station where painting changes for architecture. Rodchenko, another constructivist, hails the “death of art” in 1922 and turns to the applied arts. By this time, Cubism affects everything from shop-window displays and rugs to motion-pictures (montage stems from Picasso’s early dissections of violins and guitars).

Picasso reaches the maturity of his semi-abstract style in the monumental picture of the “Three Musicians,” treated in large flat areas—1921. After such a severe diet of pure form, he returns to another Greek formula for a chaser. His “colossal” period is inflated and empty. (Greek drawings and water-colors are to intersperse every period.)

The years 1923-1926 find his most spontaneous synthesis of the form and the object in beautifully evolved still-lives. Thereafter more experiments, particularly among the fields of surreal-

ism and sculpture. Most of his stony, dehumanized bathers (1929) are unusual sculptural projects but outside the realm of painting. Overemphasis of modelling. By now he begins to synthesise all his discoveries (plus anybody else’s) and creates at times so perfect an ensemble as “Cabine De Bain” (see reproduction), where abstract form, surrealism and nature fuse harmoniously.

The last five years let loose a violent explosion of caricatural Greek ladies, expressionist color, elliptical forms and heavy black outlines. Color shines so strongly one might be tempted to call him a Neon-Impressionist. There is also a strident vitality about the pictures like the rage of a man who has been called sterile.

This recurrence of the Greek ideal in Picasso’s work is significant. It is as though he had once smashed to bits a tantalizingly perfect Grecian statue and has thereafter, intermittently, picked up the pieces, glueing them together into increasingly stranger shapes. The Athenian maiden he had caressed lovingly in his “Rose” period returns now a sinister hag, to haunt him in his late years. Tradition is a crushing weight on the back of its strongest opponent. Picasso, you may be sure, is not giving in without a struggle—a very agonized one at that.

Having created countless abstract designs (with possibly an innocent wine bottle raising its head in each picture) and herds of nudes as immobile as abstractions, Picasso has too seldom resolved his formal as well as his subjective motives into a complete experience. Too often he is satisfied with a startling plastic idea and no more. His restlessness is more like a disease than an aesthetic propulsion—the gnawing pain of a profusely talented artist who has never found a deeply satisfying solution to the problem of content and form. That is why after pilfering the varied cultures of many lands he remains pathetically like a “man without a country.” The solution to the problems he has intensified must remain in the hands of the younger generation. Picasso has invented as well as resur-

rected numerous styles and thrown them challengingly into the art arena. The timid painter will withdraw from the scuffle to daub more fuzzy landscapes and doleful maidens as too many of our native men do; the progressive artist will utilize the most vital of these plastics for whatever he has to say.

*Joe Solman.*

**P**ICASSO, born in 1881 in Malaga, spent his youth in Barcelona, center of Spanish anarchism. Not much can be made of this fact but it suggests use of an analogy from which one or two ideas may be drawn.

Anarchism demands the release of the individual from political, social and religious control. It affirms the creative power of the absolutely free human being and aims toward a society in which human relations will not be regulated by the law of the state, organ of oppression, but determined by the agreements of wise and foreseeing, because liberated, men and women.

The anarchists however thought of their doctrine not as a guide to action but as the picture of action itself. They refused to consider any transitional stages in the struggle for a new society, *e.g.* the withering away of the state as opposed to its annihilation, or, in Spain, the necessities of the complicated three-cornered strife between feudalism, capitalism and the proletariat. They renounced organized political action in favor of their myth, the General Strike, by which the state was to be overthrown. Before the introduction of syndicalism from France the individual anarchist did not even feel it necessary to destroy the existing property relations, so sure were they that the end of the state would present automatic solutions to all historical problems. With its denial of any immediate issues falling short of the glorious uprising, this most radical sect lost all historic perspective and confidence in mass action, and became prey alternately to opportunism, and even reaction and mysticism.

What has this to do with Picasso? He is today’s painter of painters. What is said of him can be said of modern art in general. Conversely, the same conditions which determine the nature of modern art operate as creative or destructive forces in Picasso’s imagination. He is both its representative and one of its aspects.

Now, individualism is the key to the meanings of modern art. The debut of the “free” artist on the stage of society, like that of the free worker, coincides with the appearance of his work as a commodity, to be followed by the entrance of the artist himself as a com-



modity. The exploitation of the artist involved his personality as well as his painting. First he had to waste his time as a Bohemian, but later he found that he could incorporate his personality in his canvas and save energy. Scrape an abstraction and you find blood and dreams.

**O**BVIOUSLY if the artist was to function at all he had to interpret his position in a way that would restore his self-respect. Thus he tried to find an ethical exit out of history. Not able to face the fact of capitalist development and not ready to join the organized working class to overcome it, he took the only, even necessary path possible for his salvation. For the intellectual the exaltation of the individual was essential to his functioning as a destructive element in contemporary society. In this respect Picasso, like the anarchists, was a revolutionary—but, like them, only half a one.

## WOMAN READING



## PICASSO

*Courtesy Vallentine Gallery*

The painter's equivalent of the General Strike was the Creative Act of the artist. The concrete problems of the external world and society were met by a series of private statements which seemed objective because they resisted interpretation.

Picasso's alienation from the world which was the product of monopoly capitalism, of imperialism, did not mean his rejection of capitalism itself. He had neither the instruments to analyze nor the desire to face that problem. He reacted rather than acted. That is why his work has so many contradictory aspects, why its direction can never be guaranteed and why it shows neither a continuous pursuit of form with inner logical necessity, nor of a single world view. It is completely sceptical, even of the Picasso of yesterday.

**T**HE influence of Picasso's first period, 1901-1906, Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec,

Steinlen, Redon, and then Piero della Francesca, Cezanne and El Greco were easily used by him for his own ends, with wonderful mastery of line and the use of singular color to create a spiritual atmosphere. The very real streets, cafés and bedrooms of the French artists—contemporary with nineteenth century laissez-faire capitalist growth with its visible conflicts, robberies and grandiose pleasures—gave way to an enclosed realm of glorified suffering and stylized blindness, epicene clowns performing a mass with rods and hoops and beggars sitting entranced by the mystery of poverty. (Of course a few nude angels and saints with red stockings may get into this declassified and pietistic demi-heaven (Evocation, 1901). Death has no quarrel with a little bawdy. In the latter part of this period there enter the Hellenistic, Pompeian and medieval motifs which reappear in another form in his later work.

Then, 1907-14, come the break up and caricature of the modern world and the partial construction of a new—and primitive—world by inverting and juxtaposing all the old aspects. Here the rubber trade helped provoke a palace revolution. The Negro, destroyed in life, was revived in art, while the world, annihilated on canvas, rolled along merrily on Firestone tires. Or was there a prophesy of 1914?

Picasso had accomplished a great technical reorganization in the treatment of space, in sculpture, in modelling, but he could not reassemble the whole content of his experience. Caricature had shown the individual divided against himself, while reversed surfaces of cubes and cylinders (very different from Cezanne's) were not equal to transforming the old reality and far from being able to found a superior one. So Picasso made his half ironic and half wistful peace offering to the material world with newspaper clippings and pieces of wood, cardboard and cloth. *Le Journal* and *Figaro* became every painter's currency issued to disguise the bankruptcy of spirit of western, imperialist culture.

**W**ITH the abstraction, 1915, Picasso recovers poise. He has found a new plane of experience. Here objects are presented not as material but as relative, transitory, dependent upon mergers, exchanges, transparent, or mirrored in one another, their value determined by reflection. Musicians and instruments, bowls of fruit, busts and fabrics are not themselves; they hardly suggest sound, taste, sight, touch. Appearance pales before the spiritual vision of form. Just as human beings wither before the might of an international credit transaction. These paintings were wonderfully organized,



amazingly diverse, and good business too. The cultured banker, used to miracles, swallowed them like a eucharist.

Still, the painter hankered for the warm, touchable, human world. He made his second, more tragic offering. But the super-monuments, the fine classical line, the religious nobility, the heavy bodies with their almost clinical rigidity cannot bring back Greece, Rome or the Renaissance, and tomorrow no one will understand them. They are like a liberal Sunday School version of the classical life. But the fault is not Picasso's. The dynamic materialism of the Greeks belongs today to a class whose influence on western art will increase with the intensity of its struggle for power. No artist, unless he shares the experience of that class can hope to express its realistic and dialectical character.

Therefore, 1925, Picasso turned to surrealism in which, as in dreams, the whole past could be regained and treated with mystery and irony. The stained glass manner and the laurel crowns, 1932-4, only served to complete and solemnize the recapture. The identity of the organic

and inorganic, whose separation constituted an ultimate problem to the "pure" artist, was also achieved. The creatures, or forms of Picasso are symbols that belong at once to the animal, vegetable and mineral world, all the work of God or Art. Picasso was now master not only of himself but of the history of western, Christian art. This is both true and a joke. Picasso is said to have stopped painting for almost two years.

**W**EN a few weeks ago the government of Spain, in the person of its Minister of Education, the young Communist, Jesus Hernandez, offered Picasso the post of director of the Prado, Picasso declined but it is said that he contributed 1,000,000 francs as a token of loyalty to the People's Front. Before this he had designed a curtain for an anti-fascist pageant in Paris. Meanwhile, the anarchists have entered the Spanish cabinet. Reality seizes the individual. He is swept into the ranks. The question: What will Picasso's next show be like? may not be unrelated to the question: Where are Spain and France going?

*Clarence Weinstock.*

**T**HE Picasso shows at the Seligman and Valentine galleries have two things in common. They were "dealer" shows. Both were retrospective of the non-cubist, the non-structural and the subjective side of the artist. These two particulars go together. Together they emphasize the fact that the dealer exists mainly to sell. He will borrow a few outstanding canvases not for sale to bolster his show, and he will insert without qualms minor and ineffectual pieces which may be priced moderately. It is to be expected that during the present artificially induced public penchant for the neo-romantic and the unbridled emotion, a dealer's Picasso would avoid the more objective paintings.

A review of these shows is hence no review of Picasso, and any disparagement reflects very obliquely upon the master. An important museum which attempted to present the non-analytical, pathological-sentimental, blue, rose, negroid, neo-classic, neo-romantic and surrealist side of the painter in seventy pictures and did no better than this, would disappoint us gravely. It has been ineffectually shown, because there was no arrangement and no finesse of selection, that there is a definite continuity in Picasso, a sort of one-half of the man, born in the moments he was imitating Toulouse-Lautrec, and finding fruition, if we may call it that, in certain emotional extravagances of the last three years.

It may be recalled that the career of Picasso can be divided roughly into three periods. From the day he first became a creative painter and gave up copy work—from the beginning of the century that is—to the year 1908, he was an artist of emotions primarily. From 1908 to 1925 he was essentially a controlled artist, the "wild beast" become surprisingly methodical. From 1925 to the present he has veered again towards a subjective, a personal outlook. All three of these periods were relieved by tentative efforts in the opposing direction. In the first period, even while excessively personal and grotesque in his derivations from primitive art, his brush was directed, usually restrained, by the vertical and horizontal impulses he cherished from Cezanne. Likewise in 1915, following his exhaustive efforts at first an analytical and later a synthetic cubism, he developed his dynamic neo-classic figures, which were carried forward intermittently through 1923 and produced finally the restrained, the very exceptional gouaches of 1933. Since his definite interest in surrealist direction showed itself, roughly ten years ago, the deflections towards a more geometrical art are not only evident but have produced some of the finest, most stable



PICASSO  
*Courtesy Valentine Gallery*

CABINE DE BAIN



works of the artist's career. We refer to "The Studio" of 1928 and "The Painter and His Model" of the same year.

It would be false to say that the artist has fluctuated between the intellectual and emotional poles of human expression, finding no haven in either, performing nothing without the savor of an experiment. It is equally false to say that Picasso displays the sureness in the one direction of a Miro, or in the other of a Mondrian. The artist impresses us always as struggling. The constant change in his production in his own impetuous way of correcting excesses. The Rose Period of 1905 was a definite compliment to the despondent Blue Period of the year before. The extremely flat, geometric cubism of 1920 gave way suddenly to a definitely curvilinear art. It is scarcely believable the virulence with which the painter of the lovely 1933 gouaches, turned overnight to a gory and brutal picturization of death and mutilation of men, animals and naked women in his "Course De Taureaux." A closer survey than these recent shows allow us will indicate however that in spite of the current melodrama Picasso has executed a number of restrained paintings with sufficient dignity and structure to be endured a considerable length of time upon one's walls. Last year, basing his work upon numerous sketches, the artist returned in one exceptional piece both to the subject matter of "The Studio," and to the use of straight lines.

It must be clear to everyone that Picasso does not refine, and he does not consolidate with a fraction of the persistence of a Mondrian, of a Leger, or even of a Miro, the brilliance which he unquestionably possesses. We may venture further than this and say that it is characteristic of transitional figures, of iconoclasts, of men who destroy useless traditions, that their work shall be uneven and that much of it shall be dated.

It is because of the contrast partly, because of the vast bulk of insipid dead academy work around us, that the freshness of Picasso is actually a relief. We may learn that it is better to make half our paintings noisy, impudent misfits, not long satisfying to our own eyes, than to work out a formula through years of stodgy labor kid ourselves into thinking we are artists.

This does not negate the other fact: that the teachers are men like Mondrian, like Leger, like Kandinsky—men who have consistent direction, and consolidate the advances once made. It is because of their effort that we and the public will become some day more *sensitive* to vigorous expression. Abstract art will have developed with more certainty its discipline.

Much now interesting in Picasso will seem abortive and definitely curious.

It may take the *genius*—yes, as somewhat romantically understood—to picture the anarchy, the grotesqueness, to exhibit

the struggle and misery of an age. In the future society—no, more and more in *this* society the individual caprice fails to find its echo in the cooperative efforts of the group.  
*Balcomb Greene.*

## Art and Freedom

### A CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Editor:

In a recent trip through the coal fields of West and Southwest Virginia I met and talked with Bruce Crawford, who has been fighting for democracy and liberty and justice for the working masses for years, and who now edits the Democratic *Sunset News*, of Bluefield, West Virginia. I enclose one of his daily columns in the belief that its subject matter would be of interest.

More and more the artist is learning that his art is not a profession that isolates him from classification as a laborer; more and more the artist is learning that he has much in common with those of other trades and professions, the most important and common cause is the struggle to make a living. For years the artist has been something apart, something superior to the office clerk, the fish peddler, the ditch digger, the doctor, the movie actress, the student, or the professor. True, there have been Durers and Goyas, but it was only until recent years that the artist became one with the worker, that the artist came down from his ivory tower and stood in the soup, bread and picket line with the rest of his toiling fellowmen and women. Today, the struggle for culture against war and fascism brings us together as never before. We are no longer fighting for our own vague definition of art—we are fighting for the art, and culture, and life of the people who must earn their living by the sweat of their brow, for all the working people against the reactionary exploiters who would bring us war and fascism. ART FRONT should be more than a magazine, it should be a rallying call to unity and freedom and work.

JOHN C. ROGERS.

Alexandria, Va.

●  
**W**RITING in his daily column, "The Cavalier," in the Richmond *Times-Dispatch*, Thomas Lomax Hunter declared:

"Art will not flourish unless it is free." We might add that art will not flourish

unless artists are free. Also, artists will not be free unless the people are free.

There is a mistaken opinion abroad, and one that has been abroad for a long, long time, to the effect that there is no "free art" where it expresses propaganda. Propaganda, we are told, implies a repressive hand, censorship and dictation.

But isn't there propaganda of a more insidious, yet all-pervading, kind which the artist reflects in his work, sometimes unknowingly? Because he is influenced by propaganda unknowingly, he feels no restraint or dictation and so feels that he is free.

Such artists feel free so long as they don't happen to run counter to the dominant mores, so long as they don't do anything to challenge the society they live in, so long as they don't realize the limits of their freedom.

When, either by change or design, they challenge the ideology whose propaganda is stated or implied in nearly everything in the life about them, they discover the limits of their freedom. After that they may offer battle or be wary. In either case their freedom has been circumscribed. If they chose to be careful, their art has the propaganda of understatement or avoidance. To them the "system" says, "If you can't say anything good for me, say nothing about me."

Many such artists choose to say nothing. They become cynics and misanthropes, and try to ignore the imperative issues of their time. They deplore reformers, genuine reformers, and yet are beneficiaries of reforms. They seek sanctuary in propaganda-free retreats from society—which is to say they seek escape from life. They become divorced from life when they avoid all propaganda, for propaganda is an assertive force of society that cannot be dodged. In trying to elude propaganda, they spin and weave propaganda in justification of their retreat from life. They defend themselves against propaganda with more propaganda.

So there is no absolutely free art any more than there is abstract freedom, for everything is limited and hedged about



by conditions, some of them agreed upon in the social contract for the benefit of the most people.

Art expresses something. It is relatively free when the artist is relatively free and the people are comparatively free. I say relatively and comparatively, thinking of the degrees of freedom in the various countries, all having ideologies with their influence in art.

There is freedom for an art to serve the most people. Most people like such art. There is art of "decadence" which suits those who retreat from life, or those who deny that life is supposed to be enjoyed by the masses. There is "freedom"

for artists who serve kings. Yes, they can even jest. But it's no idle jest when such artists step beyond the bounds of that royal freedom and express in their art the wrong social slant.

Freedom in a class world is freedom only for the ruling class, whether is be "plutes," "proles" or middle layers. Such freedom is not absolute.

But there is more freedom in a monarchy for monarchs than for their subjects.

There is more freedom under a dictatorship of the proletariat for the working masses than there is for capitalists like Morgan, Rockefeller and the du

Ponts—because the latter types are not allowed any freedom as citizens at all!

Where a middle-class "rules" there is a certain freedom, but usually this rule is influenced by those having the greatest financial ownership and hence economic power. Freedom in such cases is only what you can get by ganging up and clamoring for your rights. And that's propaganda!

So the question of freedom with regard to art is tied up with the economic and social freedom of the people, by and for—not for irreconcilable classes, lions and lambs, Paul and Silas, fire and water, pros and cons.

Bruce Crawford

## EXHIBITIONS AND REVIEWS

A.C.A., 52 W. 8 St. Suzuki—Winner of American Artists' Congress Award. Nov. 14-28. Geri Pine—Nov. 29-Dec. 12. L. Wolchonock—Dec. 13-26.

Another Place, 43 W. 8 St. Nudes by Bertram Hartman. Dec. 2-23. Josef Lenhard—Dec. 26-Jan. 15.

Artists' Gallery, 33 W. 8 St. Ben-Zion through Nov. Rev. in this issue. Xmas show. in December.

Brummer, 53 E. 57 St. Large show of Derain through Jan. 2.

Contemporary Arts, 41 W. 54th St. "For the 5 to 50 Xmas Budget" through Dec.

Downtown Gallery, 113 W. 13th St.—Karfiol, Kuniyoshi, Laurent, Marin, O'Keefe, Sheeler. Also introducing younger Americans such as Guglielmi and Prestopino.

Valentine Gallery, 16 E. 57th St. Matisse 1912-1936. Nov. 23-Dec. 19.

Guild Art Gallery, 37 W. 57th St. Menkes, Nov. 9-28. Exhibit of 100 prints representing "America 1936." Chosen by American Artists Congress.

Marie Harriman, 61 E. 57th St. Watercolors by Rennie. Dec.

Julien Levy, 602 Madison Ave. Max Ernst—important surrealist—to Dec. 9. Dali, Dec. 10-31.

Bignou, 32 E. 57th St. A show of Cezanne with a half-dozen remarkable examples. A must show. Through Dec. 15.

Pierre Matisse, 51 E. 57th St. Retrospective exhibition of the works of Joan Miro, Nov. 30 through Dec.

Midtown Galleries, 605 Madison Ave., Waldo Pierce, Nov. 16-Dec. 5. Show by American Printmakers' Society, Dec. 7-24.

Montross, 785 - 5th Ave. Second annual exhibit of the "Ten"—Dec. 16-Jan. 4.

Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. Fantastic art, Dada and Surrealism, a comprehensive exhibit Dec. 2-Jan. 17.

New Art Circle, Neumann, 509 Madison Ave. Gouaches of flowers, dreams, and lov-

ers by Marc Chagall. Through Dec.

Marie Sterner, 9 E. 57th St. An exhibition of stage designs—drawings and watercolors—by Donald Oenslager, a leading scenic artist. Dec. 9-23.

Uptown Gallery, 72 St. and West End Ave. Werner Drewes. Nov. 30-Dec. 18.

Whitney Museum of American Art, 10 W. 8 St. Third Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting, Nov. 10-Dec. 10. Reviewed in this issue.

### THE WHITNEY

THE time has come for harsh words to be uttered about the state of American art, the inciting factor in this case being the Whitney's Museum's Third Biennial. Perhaps we cannot blame American artists in general for the disappointing showing made by the 123 invited artists, because, after all, most of those invited have been doing the same thing for years; they are established artists and just *had* to be invited. The interesting newcomers, not being established, were not invited; that is, with one or two fortunate exceptions.

One thing is clear. Most of the painters are repeating themselves through force of habit, and the habit is becoming boring. Perhaps they are supremely satisfied with their work, but, if so, they are in a state bordering on self-hypnosis. Repetition in any case is uninteresting; even a felicitous phrase by Mozart, if repeated often enough, begins to lose its grip on the auditor. Imagine how dull a phrase by Saint Saens could become under the same conditions.

The fact remains that painters like Speicher, Kroll, McFee, Karfiol, Brook, Klitgaard, Lucioni, Curry, Miller, Mattson, Hopper, Kuhn, Lawson, and several others look pretty old-fashioned. Perhaps the rush of events in recent years has made spectators impatient and restless, but it is certain that a picture must have a terrific kick in these days to hold their attention. The whole world is changing, and changing fast. Problems that have been solved long ago are no longer discussed; our contemporary vision demands new approaches to questions plastic and social.

Nor is it contemporary to make Adonis a tennis player, as Paul Cadmus has done. Hamlet in modern clothes is still Prince of Denmark, if the lines are by Shakespeare. And most people prefer their Shakespeare straight.

Marsh's "The End of 14th Street Crosstown Car" is jittery in form and color as usual; Morris Kantor is in a rut; Pollet seems terribly confused; Joe Jones has softened up a great deal, despite some excellent bits; Franklin Watkins is disappointing, and so on ad infinitum.

Of the old exhibitors, Stuart Davis, Max Weber and several other have interesting canvases. Davis's "Waterfront" is a delightful arabesque, audacious in color and pigmentation; Weber's "Seeking Work" is solid painting, besides being proof that at least one established painter has the humility and courage to change his viewpoint.

William Gropper's "The Senate" steals the show, hands down. Superbly designed and brushed, and crushing in content, it indicates that Gropper will soon



he as great a painter as he is a graphic artist. Walter Quirt's "Man in Doubt" demonstrates the artist's gift for sober distortion, rich harmonies and socially meaningful conceptions. Nahum Tschacbasov's "Deportation" is the most powerful picture in the show from the emotional standpoint. His moderated use of the Expressionist outlook should give ideas to those who are looking for new approaches.

There are other good paintings by Harry Gottlieb, Zoltan Hecht, C. Poulgalis, Louis Guglielmi, Louis Ribak, Niles Spencer, Maurice Becker, Louis Schanker, Arnold Friedman, Doris Lee and several others.

J. K.

## W. P. A. POSTER SHOW

**T**HE low level of advertising art in this country is due to those who buy the art, and not to those who create it. Every commercial artist will substantiate this statement. The advertiser and the art director of the advertising agency are interested only in imitating their competitors, and they all wait for some one else to make a break; then the style is set for a few more years. The artist, with taste and ability finds out what is wanted, and does this—but then he is only interested in the material benefits of "commercial" art. It is true that there has been some improvement lately.

This can be attributed to the influence of imported artists like Bernhard and Brodovitch, and men who have assimilated foreign ideas, such as Lester Beall, Trafton, Shepard and Taylor Poore. They have succeeded, to some extent, in convincing the business man that good art pays.

When, in August, 1935, the W.P.A. Federal Art Project took over the old poster project that Mayor La Guardia had started, the supervisor, who permitted every little Tammany ward heel to tell him what was satisfactory, remained. The artists and silk-screen operators, organized into the C.P.C. and Artists' Union, were dissatisfied with the supervisor; they felt he was incompetent and that he knew nothing of posters; they finally succeeded in having him removed. The present supervisor, R. Floethe, an experienced and talented commercial artist, took over the job last summer. The posters, produced since then, have been for the most part distinctly superior in design to those done previously.

The current exhibition of these posters at the Federal Art Gallery proves that commercial artists, if they are not ham-



POSTER

*Courtesy Federal Art Gallery*

pered by unimaginative hacks, can do work far superior to the general run of commercial work. Here is the government—long notorious for its "official art"—actually sponsoring work that is alive and modern. Perhaps the newly organized Commercial Artists' and Designers' Union, affiliated to the A. F. of L., will have some influence in raising the standards of commercial art in this country.

As to the posters in the exhibition; they were conceived with real intelligence and were effective in driving home their message; the design and printing were technically quite good. Though the silk-screen process limits the designer to a few flat colors, this really is not a disadvantage because he is forced then to keep his design down to bare elements and a minimum of lettering and colors. The medium discourages naturalistic designs; stylization and the utilization of a few colors distinguish the effective poster.

In some cases, the choice of color was not very fortunate. For example, the excellent Design Laboratory poster was printed in a sick light green, pink and sky blue. There was also a tendency to overwork the decorative design made up of tools and objects.

Outstanding were those for the housing campaign and the Theatre projects. The artists cannot be mentioned by name since they preferred to remain anonymous.

H. R.

## BEN-ZION

**A** FIRST one-man show and a distinctly mature one is at the Artists' Gallery through November. The artist is Ben-Zion who has already attracted some attention at his exhibits with the "Ten" group.

Ben-Zion is a painter who creates fables out of his subject-matter, so that even the memory of a childhood toy becomes transformed by him into a powerful and disquieting picture "Iron Bird." In other canvases like "Friday Evening," "Jew Studying," and "Still-life" one feels a deep-rooted racial strain. In fact the stout black arabesques that surround his forms resemble strangely the broad and rhythmic Hebrew script. Thus, what may at first sight appear to be plastic limitations such as outline forms or sparse color-schemes are in reality self-imposed by the artist's discipline and especial imagination—like the candid metre employed by the poet Blake.

It is Ben-Zion's naively persistent imagination that give to subjects like "The Well" and "Fireflies" the terrific impact of grim-humored folk tales. The fireflies leap out of a deep blue forest like gigantic jumping jacks headed straight for the spectator. In the "Well" the lever like a crossbow has shot the half-melon moon into the brooding night. Other canvases, like "In the Barn" retain too much of the unassimilated fact and hardly stand comparison with the artist's best. Ben-Zion may claim at least a remote kinship with such diverse artists as Chagall, Beckmann and Barlach for his sturdy concepts.

J. S.

## JUDSON BRIGGS

**J**UDSON BRIGGS has a refreshing lack of the artistic self-consciousness characteristic of most painters in their first one-man shows. In his recently concluded exhibition at the Uptown Gallery, Briggs showed himself to be a ruggedly honest painter with practically no overtones of influence, contemporary or modern. In other words, he is a natural, without the naiveté of the primitive or the sophistication of the eclectic.

Stark realism and romantic poetry vie in his work. In pictures like "Moonlight Landscape" and "Flood," Briggs does not hesitate to include yellow moons. In "Georgia," a lynching scene, and "Foreclosed," an abandoned farm, social comment is direct and bitter. An intense feeling for elemental nature is evident



throughout, particularly in "Tornado," with its black sky and green plains—in the strong, rock-edged "Seacoast," and "White Trees," stark and eloquent.

An injudicious use of black has the effect of making some of the larger pictures smcky. But then again the small gem-like landscapes indicate that the blackness is only a passing phase.

J. K.

## THE ARTIST MUST SURVIVE

**T**HE question "Shall the Artist Survive?"—general topic of a series of symposiums on the place of the creative artist in modern society, to be held Sunday nights at the Daly Theatre under the auspices of the W.P.A. Federal Art Project, will be answered in part on November 22 when the first symposium opens.

For the first time the relation of the artist to the labor movement will be explained in the light of modern conditions; for the first time a philosopher's point of view on art in a democracy will be presented.

With Dr. William I. Nunn, of the University of Newark, as chairman, a philosopher, a labor publicist, an art dealer and an artist turned government official will inaugurate the initial Sunday Night Art Forum which is scheduled for the 22nd at 8:45 o'clock at the Daly Theatre, 22 West 63rd Street.

Speakers for the evening will be Irwin Edman of the Department of Philosophy, Columbia University, on "Art in a Democracy"; Elinore M. Herrick, State Director of the American Labor Party, on "The Artist in the Labor Movement"; J. B. Neumann, Director of the New Art Circle, famous art collector, on "Does Art Pay Dividends?" and Holger Cahill, National Director of the W.P.A. Federal Art Project, who will officially open the forum. Miss Dorothy Paris is director of Sunday Night Art Forums for the art project.

Speakers scheduled to speak following the opening on November 22nd, are the following: Alfred Auerbach, editor of "Retailing" of the Fairchild Publications; Roger Baldwin, Director of the Civil Liberties Union; George Eggers, professor of Fine Arts, College of the City of New York; Dr. Harold Laski, Professor of Economics, University of London; Dr. Robert D. Leigh, President of Bennington College, Bennington, Vt.; William Lescaze, architect; John L. Lewis, President of the United Mine Workers; Dr. A. Philip McMahon, professor in Fine

Arts Department, New York University; Ernest Peixotto, art member of the Municipal Art Commission; Anna M. Rosenberg, Regional Director, Social Security Board; Dr. Florence Powdermaker, psychiatrist, and Jerome Klein, art critic of the New York Evening Post.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** As Art Front goes to press, the Federal Art Administration has decided to cut out these symposiums in view of the "possible curtailment of the Projects." Nevertheless, Dorothy Paris and the Artists' Union valiantly protested, holding the first symposium themselves—where a unanimous vote insured the continuation of these vital forums. The artists shall survive!

## AMERICAN GRAPHIC ART TODAY

*"AMERICA TODAY: A Book of One Hundred Prints"* is the important art publication just announced by Equinox Press. The prints to be reproduced in this book are those making up the exhibition entitled "America: 1936" which is to be opened simultaneously in thirty cities throughout the United States on December 1 by the American Artists' Congress. Publication date is December 10.

Lithographs, wood cuts, wood engravings, etchings, aquatints and other graphic types will comprise the hundred works to be reproduced by a process of deep-etching offset lithography in the book "America Today." While no restrictions have been placed on subject matter, it is anticipated that there will be a predominance of commentaries on social life in the United States today.

The full list of artists participating has not yet been made public, but members of the jury of selection, each of whom will be represented, have already been announced. They are Ernest Fiene, Rockwell Kent, Wanda Gag, Louis Lozowick, Arnold Blanch, Stuart Davis, Hugo Gellert, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, William Gropper, Max Weber, Harry Sternberg, Lynd Ward and George Picken.

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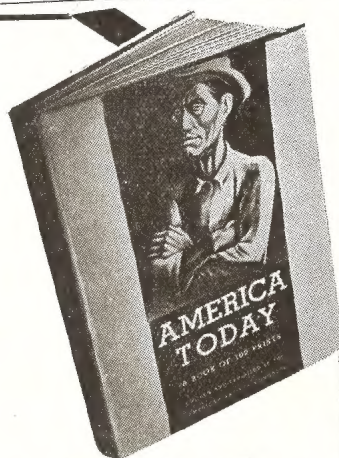
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